



SHARP FACTS

Unplanned Pregnancy Prevention: An Emergency Option

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Why is Family Planning Important?

In the United States, only half of pregnancies are planned at the time of conception. For some of these unplanned pregnancies, the women would prefer to get pregnant later; others do not desire pregnancy at all. About one half of unplanned pregnancies end in an induced abortion. Among active duty enlisted female Sailors surveyed in 2005, nearly 2 out of 3 (64%) said their last pregnancy while in the Navy was unplanned. Half of these women were not using any form of birth control. Unplanned pregnancies in the U.S. are associated with more problems for the mother and infant than planned pregnancies. Women with unplanned pregnancies cannot take advantage of preconception care, a special healthcare visit that helps the women achieve the healthiest possible pregnancy outcome. Planning to become pregnant at a time when a woman is healthy and ready to become a parent can maximize the health and opportunities for women, children and families.

What is the most effective method of birth control?

Only abstinence (not having sex) is 100% effective in preventing pregnancy. Birth control methods that are highly effective are hormone injections, IUDs (intrauterine devices) and sterilization (vasectomy and tubal ligation). Methods that can be very effective when used correctly are birth control pills, the "ring", the "patch", periodic abstinence (natural family planning), the diaphragm, and condoms.

What can a woman do to prevent pregnancy if she has unprotected sex?

If a woman has had intercourse without using birth control or if something happened (such as a condom broke), she can use emergency contraception **up to 72 hours after** unprotected sex. PLAN B®, (Levonorgestrel) is an emergency contraception product which has been approved by the FDA for over-the-counter sales. PLAN B® is available at Navy pharmacies upon request to anyone aged 18 and over who is authorized care in a military medical facility. Plan B may also be purchased over the counter by anyone aged 18 and over in any retail pharmacy. Another form of emergency contraception involves the insertion of a copper-releasing IUD by your doctor.

Facts about emergency contraceptives

In addition to PLAN B®, a variety of pill combinations are available for use as emergency contraception. The mechanism of action of emergency contraceptive pills is not fully understood. They may work by disrupting ovulation, fertilization, or implantation. These pills are not effective once the fertilized egg has implanted and will not affect an established pregnancy.

Emergency contraceptives:

- do **not** protect against sexually transmitted diseases.
- are **not** intended for frequent use.
- should **not** be taken *before* unprotected sex.
- are **not** recommended as the primary form of contraception, because EC is not as effective as many contraceptive methods available for this purpose.

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How effective are emergency contraceptive pills (ECP)? Emergency contraceptive pills containing progestin only (Levonorgestrel), such as PLAN B®, reduce the risk of pregnancy by 89% - which means the number of women who would be expected to become pregnant after unprotected sex drops from 8 of 100 without any contraception to about 1 of 100 when PLAN B® is taken within 72 hours of the unprotected sex. Use of ECPs containing combined estrogen-progestin reduce the risk of pregnancy by 75%.

What will happen when I take emergency contraceptive pills? Side effects may include nausea and vomiting, and may cause spotting or changes in the amount, timing or duration of the next menstrual period.

Is emergency contraception the same as the "morning after pill"? Yes. However, the words "morning after" are misleading, because emergency contraceptive pills can be used up to 72 hours after sex, not just the next morning. However, ECPs are more effective the sooner they are taken, and most effective during the first 24 hours.

Is emergency contraception the same as RU-486, the "abortion pill"? No. RU-486 (the "abortion pill") and emergency contraceptive pills are different. RU-486 will actually induce an abortion after a woman has conceived. The FDA has stated that there is no evidence that emergency contraceptive pills will have an adverse effect on an established pregnancy.

Is emergency contraception new? No, EC therapy has been known and used for many years.

What family planning services are available through the Navy?

Counseling and information

BUMED Instruction 6300.9 directs Naval medical facilities, including facilities on board naval vessels, to provide (or authorizes them to provide referral to) family planning services. Also, MANMED Article 15-112 provides annual health maintenance examination requirements for all active duty women which includes family planning, contraceptive counseling, and STD prevention counseling. Counseling should include information on availability and effectiveness of birth control methods (including emergency contraception).

Emergency Contraceptives

Emergency contraception pills are available over the counter in Navy pharmacies and retail pharmacies by women over aged 18 and over.

Where can I get more information?

For detailed information, counseling, and access to birth control options, contact your health care provider. For further information regarding your sexual health, visit the Sexual Health and Responsibility Program Home Page at <http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil/hp/sharp>.

This information was adapted by the Sexual Health and Responsibility Program (SHARP), Directorate Population Health, Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center from Hatcher et al (2004) Contraceptive Technology, 18th ed; Protecting Against Unintended Pregnancy: A Guide to Contraceptive Choices, U.S. Food and Drug Administration (June 2000); BUMEDINST 6300.9 Family Planning Services (20 Sep 2001); MANMED Article 15-112, Annual Health Maintenance Examination Recommendations for Active Duty Members; BUMED Policy 07-005, Prescribing, Dispensing and Distribution of Plan B (Levonorgestrel), 27 Feb 2007; Emergency Contraception, Kaiser Family Foundation fact sheet Nov 2005; Uriell, Z. (2006) Results of the 2005 Pregnancy and Parenthood Survey. Navy Personnel Research, Studies, & Technology, Millington TN; Fact Sheet - Women's Health Policy facts - Emergency Contraception, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Menlo Park CA (Feb 2004), and The Federal Register Feb 25, 1997 62:37:8610-8612, Certain Combined Oral Contraceptives for use as postcoital emergency contraception - notice.